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General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
11th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 4 November 1992
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. FUENTES-IBAÑEZ (Vice-Chairman)	(Bolivia)
later:	Mr. KHOUINI (Chairman)	(Tunisia)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

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25 November 1992
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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/47/13, 413, 438, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493 and 601)

1. In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Fuentes-Ibañez (Bolivia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

2. Mr. ARTZIELI (Israel) said that his delegation would refrain from commenting in detail on the report of the Commissioner-General (A/47/13), although it had much to say in response to its statements and general tenor. Neither would it reply to the distortions and defamatory accusations heard in some of the speeches during the debate. Its decision took into account the current peace process and reflected the wish to reduce polemics, charges and countercharges, and to set a tone conducive to the spirit of the peace negotiations.

3. His delegation would like to mention some of the steps taken by Israel during the reporting period to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian Arabs, including Arab refugees, and on the measures adopted recently by the new Government of Israel. They included restructuring of tax law and labour reform intended to provide full social and health benefits to Arab employees in the territories, like those granted to all union employees in Israel. Furthermore, steps had been taken to rehabilitate refugees and to review individual cases of resettlement of displaced persons. As a result, the number of persons who had returned to the administered territories had reached 79,368, not including persons who had returned to the territories in 1967 and 1968.

4. All college and university campuses throughout the territories had been reopened. Incentives had been offered for export, local production and investment as well as the establishment of new factories in the West Bank and Gaza district. At the same time, measures had been implemented to improve the atmosphere among the Arab residents, such as the suspension of deportation orders.

5. As in previous years, Israel had extended its cooperation and assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), subject to arrangements required by considerations of military security. Despite the difficult situation of recent years, including the difficulties emanating from unilateral attempts by UNRWA to broaden its activities beyond the limits of its original mandate, the Government of Israel had made considerable efforts to reduce friction.

6. Table 13 of the report of the Commissioner-General (A/47/13) listing contributions in cash and in kind by Governments, showed that, during the reporting period, Israel had contributed the sum of US$ 112,141. His delegation wished to point out that, in fact, Israel as host country had made

(Mr. Artzieli, Israel)

contributions in kind amounting to an additional estimated $25.8 million, distributed among education, relief and social services, health, housing and miscellaneous expenses.

7. Since the Madrid Conference in October 1991, Israel and its Arab neighbours had been engaged in a peace process which included bilateral and multilateral negotiations. The new Government of Israel intended to take vigorous steps to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The multilateral negotiations were dealing with a number of issues of common interest, including the refugee problem. Recently, the United Nations had been invited to participate in the multilateral talks, including the working group on refugees.

8. It would be in the framework of the multilateral talks and not at the United Nations that the problems of refugees would be discussed, negotiated, and, hopefully, solved. Israel trusted that the Special Political Committee would abandon the positions taken in the past in order to move towards the future. The resolutions adopted on that item in previous years, for the most part unacceptable to his delegation, did not aid the plight of refugees. In fact, one-sided resolutions did not contribute to the peace process - they hindered it. Given the emerging regional trends in the direction of peace, it was logical to hope that the changes in the Middle East would lead to a new approach regarding outdated United Nations resolutions as well, for the purpose of creating a climate of mutual tolerance, trust and respect.

9. Mr. BISHER (United Arab Emirates) said that his delegation was certain that UNRWA programmes were vital and essential until peace was achieved in the Middle East and the situation of refugees had been resolved in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. Israel was responsible for the situation of refugees, specifically the implementation of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) relative to the return of refugees. However, Israel had continued to impede the attainment of those objectives.

10. As could be seen from the report, the sufferings of the refugee population were worsening. Despite the optimism generated by the multilateral talks in Madrid, tension was increasing and living conditions were deplorable for many inhabitants of the occupied territories. In particular, the civilian population suffered from the measures imposed by Israel, such as expropriation of land, uprooting of trees and sealing of houses. Moreover, Israel violated international law by detaining 12,700 residents of the occupied territories, 7,500 of whom were held in military detention centres.

11. Since the beginning of the intifadah, Israel had deported hundreds of people, including UNRWA officials. Soldiers used weapons of war against children armed only with stones. Despite it all, the Palestinian people, in their years of struggle against Israeli occupation, had shown their desire to resolve the refugee problem in accordance with the norms of international law.

(Mr. Bisher, United Arab Emirates)

12. The United Arab Emirates reaffirmed its support to the Palestinian people for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination, and urged the international community to continue offering its support as well.

13. Mr. ZHANG Yan (China) said that, during the period covered by the report (A/47/13) the question of Palestine still had remained unresolved. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly had adopted 11 resolutions concerning that item, most of which had not been implemented.

14. The United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine had submitted 46 reports up to the present, but no progress had been made in the implementation of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). Furthermore, UNRWA had encountered difficulties in carrying out its work; its staff members were frequently detained and their lives threatened. He hoped, nevertheless, that the Israeli authorities would faithfully implement the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, would respect the fourth Geneva Convention and meet their obligations under the United Nations Charter to allow UNRWA to carry out its work unimpeded.

15. In the period 1991-1992, UNRWA had worked under very difficult and even dangerous conditions. His delegation expressed its thanks and admiration to UNRWA staff for their achievements and dedication.

16. The question of Palestine was a regional conflict over which the United Nations had held lengthy deliberations. The key to the question of Palestine refugees lay in a just and reasonable solution to the Palestinian question at an early date. Since the start of the Peace Conference on the Middle East, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 46/75, a new turning-point in that process. He sincerely hoped that those multilateral meetings would yield positive results.

17. China supported the Peace Conference on the Middle East and had participated in the third phase of meetings as well as in the meetings of the multilateral working groups, including the group on the question of refugees. The Chinese Government had always advocated a political solution to the Middle East situation on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the return of the Arab territories and the re-establishment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people ensuring respect for their sovereignty, and the security of all countries of the Middle East, including Israel.

18. China enjoyed good relations with the Arab States and had also established diplomatic relations with Israel. It was ready to make a contribution to the achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East at an early date.

19. Mr. LORFI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation had carefully reviewed the report of the Commissioner-General (A/47/13) which described the painful conditions under which the Palestinian people had been living in the occupied territories for more than four decades. He referred in particular to paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of that report and to table 12 which indicated the number of casualties in the occupied territories between 1 July 1991 and 30 June 1992.

20. The vital role that education could play in improving the cultural, scientific and social levels of the people of the occupied territories was undisputable, and that was why his delegation was highly concerned about the future of Palestinian students who were, according to paragraph 17 of the report currently facing grave educational obstacles.

21. The economic problems of the occupied territories was another matter of grave concern. In that connection, the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/47/294 presented further evidence of the inhumane practices of the occupying authorities towards the legitimate owners of those territories.

22. UNRWA was trying to improve the living conditions of the deprived people of Palestine but in order to achieve that goal, it needed the continuing help of the international community. The Islamic Republic of Iran continued to make its annual contribution to UNRWA. In addition, the International Islamic University of Iran would begin to grant scholarships to Palestinian students with a view to enhancing their scientific knowledge in various fields.

23. Finally, he reiterated his delegation's condemnation of the inhumane policies of the occupying power and stressed the need for the continuation of the Agency's work and the extension of its mandate.

24. Mr. Khouini (Tunisia) took the Chair.

25. Mr. ALAMUDDIN (Lebanon) said that his country had always stood ready to cooperate with respect to the question of Palestine refugees and deplored the fact that after 43 years, the question of Palestine refugees had still not been resolved. The problem was the result of the repressive practices of Israel, its contempt for resolutions and treaties, its acts of aggression against Palestinian camps and its occupation of Palestinian territories.

26. Moreover, Israel had not implemented Security Council resolution 425 (1978) which constituted a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention. In order to find a constructive solution to the problem, it was essential that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their natural aspirations to self-determination be respected. The international community should apply pressure on Israel to compensate the refugees, allow displaced people to return and give them back their lands.

(Mr. Alamuddin, Lebanon)

27. His country gave asylum to Palestine refugees and, despite its limited resources, had also contributed facilities and services. The people and economy of Lebanon had paid a high price for that contribution particularly in the southern part of the country. Lebanon urged all States to contribute to UNRWA, which played a key role in seeking a solution to the problem of Palestine refugees and recommended the re-establishment of the Agency's headquarters in Beirut when security conditions so permitted.

28. Finally, he stressed the importance of enabling the Palestinian students to finish their studies in the occupied territories.

29. Mr. LI Song Jin (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that since its establishment in 1949, UNRWA had been carrying out a wide range of activities in the fields of education, health, relief and social services for the benefit of Palestinian refugees. However, despite the Agency's enormous endeavours, there had been no fundamental changes in the situation of the Palestinian refugees as the report of the Commissioner-General (A/47/13) showed.

30. If peace was to be achieved in the Middle East, Israel would have to renounce its claims to the occupied Arab territories and withdraw its troops from them and the issues of political independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rights of all States in the region to exist would have to be adequately settled. Israel should also comply fully with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention and respect the rights of UNRWA staff.

31. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea supported the holding of international peace talks on the Middle East with the participation of the representative of Palestine and, in particular, the efforts of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples towards a fair solution of the Middle East question.

32. Mr. MANSOUR (Observer for Palestine) said that the statement of the representative of Israel contained inaccurate data on, for instance, the number of displaced Palestinians who had been allowed to come back to the occupied Palestinian territories. There was a glaring difference between Israel's figure of 79,368 and the figure of 12,000 in the reports of the Secretary-General and of the High Commissioner. On the other hand, the representative of Israel had not commented on many paragraphs of the Commissioner-General's report because he could not refute the facts in them.

33. Israel recognized that the United Nations had been invited to participate in the working group on refugees but the representative of Israel had said that the question of refugees should not be considered at the United Nations but rather within the framework of multilateral talks. If the representative of Israel accepted the participation of the United Nations, he should also accept that such participation had to be based on United Nations resolutions.

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

34. If the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council were implemented, the work of the Special Political Committee, the General Assembly and the Security Council would end. However, if a country did not respect its obligations under the Charter, it was incumbent upon the United Nations and the Special Political Committee to continue their discussions on the topic until such Member complied with those obligations and implemented the relevant resolutions.

35. Contrary to what the representative of Israel had said, his delegation did not consider the General Assembly resolutions relating to the difficult situation of Palestine refugees unilateral. The most important of those resolutions was General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, in particular its paragraph 11. That resolution could not be described as unilateral. For many years, and most recently at the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, the United States had submitted draft resolutions on the question of Palestine refugees and no country had voted against such resolutions, not even Israel.

36. In 1949, when Israel had been admitted as a State Member of the United Nations, the representative of Israel had made a statement in which his country undertook to implement General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III); therefore, Israel could not now say that such resolutions were unilateral. What was happening was that Israel refused to implement those resolutions, and if Israel continued to refuse to implement the resolutions, including Security Council resolution 237 (1967), the United Nations would continue to consider that question for as long necessary.

37. The CHAIRMAN announced that, at its 12th meeting, to be held on Thursday, 5 November 1992, at 10 a.m., the Committee would continue and conclude the general debate on agenda item 73. At its 13th meeting to be held on Friday, 6 November, at 10 a.m., the Committee would begin the consideration of agenda item 33 entitled "Policies of apartheid of the Government of South Africa".

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
12th meeting
held on
Thursday, 5 November 1992
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KHOUINI (Tunisia)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/47/13, 413, 438, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 576 and 601)

1. Mr. SUMI (Japan) said that the situation of the refugees in the occupied territories was still critical, particularly that of the Palestinians, who continued to require assistance in such fields as education, health and hygiene. Measures such as administrative detention and the sealing and demolition of houses, which the Israeli authorities continued to apply in the occupied territories were also cause for concern. Nevertheless, there had been some positive signs, including the release of prisoners and of the non-implementation of deportation orders.

2. Japan was also seriously concerned about the safety of UNRWA staff and the integrity of its installations, not only because of threats by the Israeli forces, but also owing to the confrontations within the Palestinian community, which had included attacks against Agency staff members. His country strongly appealed to all parties to respect the rights and duties of the UNRWA staff and urged the Israeli authorities to comply fully with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention.

3. Japan was a major supporter of UNRWA; in 1992 it had donated $11 million in addition to its pledge of $7 million in food assistance for the people of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Commissioner-General was continuing his various promotional activities, including fund-raising, and that other countries had joined the work of UNRWA by making donations in cash and in kind.

4. With regard to education, Japan was greatly concerned about the poor results in academic achievements tests in both Lebanon and the occupied territories, which were partly due to the fact that school programmes had been disrupted by curfews, civil disturbances, school closures and strikes. His country called upon Israel to ensure that all educational establishments remained open and fully functioning throughout the academic year.

5. Japan had provided 16 fellowships in 1992 through UNRWA to Palestinian refugees employed by the Agency as vocational training personnel. Through that programme, which had been established in 1985 and was currently administered by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, his Government had awarded a total of 100 fellowships. Japan had also donated $1 million to the Agency's university-scholarship programme to be spent over a five-year period.

6. His country was greatly encouraged by the bilateral peace talks initiated in Madrid in 1991 and the further progress being made in the multilateral negotiations. It would spare no effort to achieve progress in the peace talks and appealed to all parties concerned to commit themselves to confidence-building measures so that all the peoples of the region could enjoy more secure and prosperous lives.

7. Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that the annual report of UNRWA to the Committee had given a comprehensive and detailed overview of the Agency's vital work. Canada strongly supported the peace process and had been actively engaged in the multilateral talks, presiding over the Working Group on Refugees. In that regard, his country had recently transmitted to the Secretary-General an invitation for the United Nations to participate in the next meeting of the Working Group, to be held in Ottawa on 11 and 12 November.

8. Canada remained deeply concerned that serious violence persisted in the occupied territories and believed that, until a comprehensive solution to the causes of the violence was achieved, the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention should be fully applied. Canada was also concerned at the deportations of Palestinians from the occupied territories, administrative detentions, the demolition of housing and the closure of streets. He welcomed the confidence-building measures announced by the Israeli Government in August and encouraged Israel to continue in that direction. The other parties in the peace process should also take initiatives matching those confidence-building measures.

9. It was particularly disturbing, in the context of an improved climate for peace negotiations, that UNRWA personnel and facilities were subject to violence and harassment during the performance of their duties, as detailed in the report of the Commissioner-General. He commended the essential educational, health and relief services provided by the Agency to the more than 2.6 million Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the occupied territories as well as the assistance provided to thousands of Palestinians directly affected by the Gulf war. An area of particular concern was the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, particularly the six to seven thousand displaced families living in the worst conditions without economic and social rights, which prevented them from helping themselves.

10. One of the premises of Canadian development assistance was that the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes could be achieved only through the direct participation of all concerned. Canada had financed in particular programmes which empowered Palestinian women to play their full part in the development of their society and had contributed over $250,000 to a number of those projects, including support for the activities of the women's programme centres at the Jerash and Marka camps in Jordan. His country had also provided $150,000 for the development of a participatory programme to build up Palestinian refugee self-reliance and had contributed $315,000 to the income generation programme's revolving fund earmarked for activities in the West Bank and Gaza.

11. In 1992, Canada had provided $11 million to the Agency's core programmes for 1992 and would continue to give financial support to UNRWA as it had in the past. He urged the wealthier countries, including those in the region, to match or exceed that level of assistance. UNRWA would continue to enjoy Canada's support until the day when the Member States decided that the Agency could be dissolved as a result of a peace settlement in the Middle East.

12. Mr. AL-HARBI (Saudi Arabia) said that the report of the Commissioner-General clearly described the sufferings of the Palestinian people because of the policies of persecution and oppression imposed by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories. The optimism produced by the beginning of the Madrid peace talks had cooled, because the precondition of Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and compliance with all relevant resolutions, had not been fulfilled.

13. The situation in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained critical, since harsh measures continued to be applied against the civilian population, including collective punishment such as curfews, punitive demolition and sealing of houses and shelters, expropriation of land and uprooting of trees. His delegation was deeply concerned by the number of residents of the territories being held in prisons and military detention centres, in violation of the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and by the number of Palestinians who had died in confrontations with Israeli security forces in the occupied territories.

14. The economic situation of the occupied territories and Gaza Strip continued to worsen due to obstacles imposed by the Israeli authorities to the granting of work permits to Palestinians, restriction of movement in the occupied territory and reservation of the use of land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for military or Israeli civilian use.

15. High rates of taxation also hampered economic initiatives, because the level of tax paid by Palestinians was twice that paid by Israeli settlers. High taxation had acted as a disincentive to the export of products from the occupied territories to Europe. Those factors, combined with the drop in remittances from the Gulf States as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, had had repercussions on the work of UNRWA concerning subsidies and the availability of jobs.

16. Saudi Arabia appealed to the international community to increase contributions to UNRWA so that it could continue to carry out its work and to demand that the Israeli authorities protect UNRWA staff so as to enable them to continue fulfilling their humanitarian mission. In any case, the problem of the Palestine refugees would be solved only when they were permitted to return to their homes or when those not wishing to return were paid compensation.

17. Ms. BIRD (Australia) said that the situation in the Middle East gave cause for both optimism and concern. Optimism, because the peace talks could open the way to a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in that region; concern, because of the continuing violence and tensions besetting the region. The work of UNRWA was even more commendable, considering that it had been forced to cope with changing circumstances and increasing tension and violence, utilizing available resources to the maximum.

(Ms. Bird, Australia)

18. Australia welcomed the participation of UNRWA in the multilateral working group on refugees, as well as its readiness to help the Palestinians prepare for an interim self-government. Its expertise and experience, gained over 42 years of serving the Palestinian refugee community, should be utilized when considering self-government arrangements.

19. The professionalism with which UNRWA provided its services under the difficult circumstances prevailing in the occupied territories was commendable. Punitive measures imposed against the Palestinian population, such as curfews in the refugee camps, impeded its work and the normal functioning of schools and medical services. Furthermore, lengthy curfews forced UNRWA to distribute emergency food supplies, thereby reducing its limited resources even further.

20. Australia understood the need for Israel to take measures to meet its legitimate security concerns but urged Israel to abide by the fourth Geneva Convention, and appealed to all parties to respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA staff. Australia welcomed the willingness of the recently elected Government of Israel to enter into a more substantive dialogue with UNRWA and the fact that, as mentioned by the Commissioner-General in his introductory statement, it had taken some positive measures in that regard.

21. The financial prospects of the Agency for 1993 were a cause for concern, and Australia urged all Member States to contribute. The financial problems of UNRWA would be alleviated if some Member States increased their contributions. For its part, Australia planned to contribute $2.6 million to the core budget for the 1992-1993 financial year.

22. Mr. AL-ZAYANI (Bahrain) recalled that, although the Middle East peace talks begun in Madrid had given rise to some optimism and relief in respect of the future of Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories, the situation in that region had continued to worsen and remained a cause for concern. The occupying authorities persisted in imposing Draconian measures against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, such as curfews, the destruction of property, sealing of houses or expropriation of land, which impeded UNRWA activities and caused concern among its staff. There appeared to be no correlation between developments at the diplomatic and political level and the specific events which had repercussions on the daily life of the Palestinians.

23. The occupying authorities continued to violate the privileges and immunities of UNRWA staff. Nevertheless, the Agency had continued to carry out sustained efforts to intensify its programme of work and to meet the additional needs which had recently arisen due to the changing situation in the occupied territories. To that end, the Agency had established or expanded education and health programmes. In the social sphere, it had expanded its activities for women and training programmes for the disabled.

(Mr. Al-Zayani, Bahrain)

24. The Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA had noted with satisfaction that the Agency had received sufficient funds to implement the essential parts of its programmes in 1991. However, it had noted with concern that it had met with difficulties in maintaining the necessary level of contributions to the programme for extraordinary measures in Lebanon and the occupied territory. Bahrain commended the Commissioner-General for his efforts to collect funds from many sources and hoped that the level of contributions would increase for the following year so that the Agency could fulfil its essential functions adequately, until a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the problems of the Middle East could be found, and the Palestinian people enjoyed its inalienable rights, including the right to return, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on its national territory.

25. Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic) thanked the Commissioner-General for referring in his introductory statement to the Syrian Arab Republic as one of the countries that had received Palestine refugees. His Government felt that taking in Palestine refugees was its patriotic duty.

26. His delegation had read with great interest the report which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had submitted to the General Assembly at its current session (A/47/13), and wished to make the following remarks. In the first place, the Commissioner-General had in the past followed the practice of keeping in touch with concerned parties in the receiving countries before drafting his annual report to the Assembly, in order to ensure that the text of the report was worded carefully and that it properly reflected problems relating to the Agency, its services or the refugees. For some time, however, the Commissioner-General had stopped making those contacts. In view of the importance of that aspect of the question under discussion, his Government hoped that the Commissioner-General would contact Syria, in its capacity as a host country, before drafting his report, as had been the custom in previous years.

27. As was pointed out in the report, the situation in the occupied Arab territories remained critical, since no significant relaxation in the traditional pattern of the Israeli occupation policies had occurred. It was easy to see that the economic and social situation had deteriorated, and that the Agency was working under difficult circumstances as a result of the oppressive practices of the Israeli occupation authorities.

28. The refugee problem was an international responsibility, and the assistance provided to the Palestinian people was not commensurate with their tragedy. The reasons for the continued suffering of the Palestinian people were the refusal of the Israeli occupation authorities to apply the relevant United Nations resolutions, as they considered themselves to be beyond the jurisdiction of the international community.

29. Syria had participated in the peace process in order to achieve a just and lasting global peace in the region. The peace process was based on the

(Mr. Shaheed, Syrian Arab Republic)

strict application of the principles contained in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1978), i.e., the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by war. The solution to the question of Palestine required the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and from the other Arab territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, especially its right to return and to self-determination, and the establishment of an independent State on its own soil. Security considerations could not justify the continuation of the occupation, and unilateral annexation measures were contrary to the principles of international law currently in force.

30. Like other Arab countries that had received Palestine refugees, the Syrian Arab Republic was providing many different kinds of services to those refugees, and as a result, his country was bearing a much heavier financial burden than other countries. The discussion of that issue in the report, however, was too brief.

31. The reasons that had made it necessary to transfer the Agency's headquarters from Beirut to Vienna had disappeared. The fact that its headquarters was so far away from the field of operations prevented UNRWA from carrying out its duties effectively. His delegation reiterated the request, which had already been made on other occasions, that the headquarters of the Agency be transferred permanently to Beirut. The transfer should be implemented immediately.

32. In the view of his delegation, it would be very helpful if the members of the Advisory Commission would play an active part in drawing up the general guidelines for the Agency's budget. Because the budget for the biennium 1992-1993 had already been approved, that participation should begin, at the latest, during the preparation of the budget for the following fiscal period, 1994-1995. During that biennium, the funds allocated to essential services, such as education, health care, emergency assistance and all types of social services should be increased.

33. In paragraph 22 of his report, the Commissioner-General had pointed out that the Agency would be willing to transfer its programmes and facilities to the Palestinian institutions emerging in the event of self-government in the occupied territories. The Syrian Arab Republic would prefer not to discuss that matter until the outcome of the peace talks was known. The United Nations should extend the mandate of the Agency until such time as the refugees returned to their homeland and established an independent State.

34. With regard to the services the Agency was providing to refugees in the area of education, he noted that the activities which UNRWA was carrying out in Syria had met with some obstacles. At the joint meeting on questions relating to education, held in Cairo in January 1992, some useful proposals had been made for solving those problems, including the construction of new schools or the expansion and modernization of existing ones, with a view to preventing overcrowding of students.

(Mr. Shaheed, Syrian Arab Republic)

35. In addition, as was pointed out in the report, it was important to expand and improve the health services provided by the Agency. Likewise, social and relief services should be increased, and efforts should be made to provide such services to Palestine refugees and to all other refugees who found themselves in difficult situations. In that regard, it was to be hoped that the provisions of General Assembly resolution 46/46 of 9 December 1991 would be fully observed. It should be noted also that the current problems in the occupied territories could not be solved unless the safety of UNRWA personnel was guaranteed.

36. Contributions to the Agency must be increased, inasmuch as it was providing essential education and health services, as well as relief, to the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories. For its part, Syria wished to express its satisfaction at the work of the Agency and state its desire to continue collaborating with the Agency as it continued to carry out its noble and humanitarian task.

37. Mr. AL-OTAIBI (Kuwait) announced that the Government of Kuwait had decided to increase by $250,000 its regular yearly contribution to the Agency; thus, its total contribution would amount to $1.75 million. The Agency must be enabled to maintain its level of activities and operations in the different areas in which it was providing services, especially on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In that respect, Kuwait hoped that the Agency's mandate would be extended for another three-year period.

38. In recent years, extraordinary events had taken place in the Middle East which had had a negative impact on the Agency's work, and had led to a deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestine refugees. He was referring to the intifadah, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and the Jewish immigration.

39. The peace talks, on the Middle East, in which Kuwait was participating, offered a unique opportunity to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). However, in order for the peace process to be successful the parties must adopt confidence-building measures. In particular, Israel should put an end to the practices of harassment of civilians in which it engaged in the occupied territories and which constituted a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and should promote genuine improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

40. Ms. GUEVARA (Philippines) supported the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to broaden the Agency's donor base. In recent years, the Agency had found it necessary to increase the level of assistance provided to Palestine refugees both in their countries of asylum and in the occupied territories: the socio-economic conditions in the entire

(Ms. Guevara, Philippines)

area had worsened and a large number of Palestinians from Kuwait and other Gulf countries had returned to the countries of the region, especially to Jordan. In those circumstances, her delegation was gratified by the Agency's attempt to pursue income-generating and job creation programmes in order to address the new problems. However, the Agency would require substantial amounts to fund its programme of extraordinary measures in Lebanon and the occupied territories.

41. The security conditions of the Agency's staff in the occupied territories were another cause for concern. During the period covered by the report, the Israeli security authorities had arrested and detained a number of the Agency's staff and had placed restrictions on the movement of others in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel should desist from such practices.

42. The Philippines welcomed the convening of the Peace Conference on the Middle East, which was the only way of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) of the dispute between Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries on the one hand and between Israel and the Palestine refugees on the other. UNRWA, which had been established in 1949 as a temporary agency, should not be an alternative to the resolution of the conflict.

43. Nevertheless, the Conference should lead to an improvement in the day-to-day life of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Israeli authorities continued to apply harsh measures against the civilian population, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The parties should therefore adopt confidence-building measures to help ease tensions. In that connection, the recent decision by the Israeli authorities to release a number of Palestinian prisoners, ease travel restrictions and reopen sealed homes was a step in the right direction.

44. Mr. FREUDENSCHUSS (Austria) said that, while the continuation of the peace process and the more constructive approach adopted by the new Israeli Government were positive elements, the situation in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained critical, as noted by the Commissioner-General of the Agency in his report (A/47/13).

45. Despite some positive steps taken by Israel, such as the release of prisoners and the reopening of universities, the Israeli authorities had still not adopted decisive confidence-building measures to improve the living conditions of the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories.

46. The frequent harassment by the Israeli security forces of the Agency's staff was also a matter of concern. Austria valued the important work of the Agency and its participation in the multilateral peace negotiations in the Middle East, especially in the working group on refugees. That work would be even more valuable in the transfer to interim self-government of the

(Mr. Freudenschuss, Austria)

Palestinian people, which was one of the primary objectives of the current negotiations.

47. Austria, which in recent years had increased its contribution to the Agency and had become one of its major donors, supported the efforts by the Commissioner-General to broaden the donor base, in particular with regard to the wealthier States of the region. The Agency should continue to provide assistance to the Palestine refugees until a solution was found to the problem, which continued to be a threat to international peace and security.

48. Mr. TURKMEN (Commissioner-General), referring to the observation by Syria that the Agency no longer consulted with the Governments of the countries of asylum in the preparation of the report, said that he did not think that the complaint was justified, since Syria was a member of the Agency's Advisory Commission and, in that capacity, had participated in the review of the draft report and made recommendations on it, which the Agency had taken into account. The Chairman of the Commission had addressed a letter to the Commissioner-General in which he had praised the report and had recommended its adoption by the General Assembly.

49. The Commissioner-General noted that 1993 would be a difficult year for the Agency. It would not be easy to maintain the level of operations and services, in view of the deteriorating economic situation in the region and the demographic growth of the Palestinian people. Consequently, the Agency would need the support of all Governments in the region, in particular those which had not made any large-scale contributions so far. The Commissioner-General hoped that at the pledging conference, which would be held on 2 December 1992, the Agency would receive substantial contributions.

50. Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic), said that he wished to clarify one point: his statement had referred to contact with the Commissioner-General prior to the drafting of the report. It was true that Syria was a member of the Advisory Commission and had participated in its discussions. What he wished to know, however, was whether the report had been revised subsequent to the consideration of the draft report at Vienna.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.